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The central design of the Union's official seal is the Eastern Goldfinch, designated State Bird of Iowa in 1923.

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EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION OFFICE  
WINTHROP, IOWA

## OBSERVATIONS ON THE AMERICAN EGRET IN IOWA

By CHARLES A. STEWART  
NEW ALBIN, IOWA

The Iowa Academy of Science has recently published a paper by James Hodges\* of Davenport on the American Egret (*Casmerodius albus egretta*) in the state of Iowa. This paper is a compilation of reports received by Mr. Hodges from observers in several parts of the state together with his personal observations. As I live on the banks of the Mississippi River in extreme northeast Iowa, and the sloughs of the river are the summer home of many egrets, it seems appropriate that my personal observations of this bird and its habits during post-nuptial migrations should be published as a supplement to Mr. Hodges' paper.

Along the river during the summer, the American Egret is the most plentiful water bird of the sloughs. During years when the water is low (such years I call "egret years") we do not count individuals but estimate in the hundreds. The northern limit of the range for large numbers of egrets on the Mississippi sloughs is about Reno, Minnesota. It should not be understood that this is the northern limit of the summer migration of this bird, as they are found well into central Minnesota but in smaller numbers. North of Reno the islands in the river have been largely denuded of trees by the Army Engineers in making the new channel. This kind of habitat is not to the liking of the egret. They demand tree-bordered sloughs of medium depth but deep enough in the center to support fish life. They do not tolerate muddy water because of difficulty in seeing their food. These ecological conditions are well fulfilled in the area described in northeast Iowa.

The story of the American Egret in Iowa is a story of original abundance, then a scarcity, and at the present time, again an approaching abundance. The cycle of abundance, scarcity and later abundance, is also the history of the American Egret in its breeding range in the southern states, as well as in other parts of the country that it frequents during the post-nuptial wanderings. The period of scarcity in this cycle represents one of the worst examples of the power of mankind for destruction over the weaker natural life around us. It it exceeded in viciousness only by the extermination of the Passenger Pigeon.

The period of scarcity during the late '80's and early 1900's was the work of the plume hunters in the breeding ranges of the south. The plumes of the egret occur only during the breeding season and are at their prime about the time the young are hatched. Because of this the hunters waited until the young were hatched before they started the slaughter. The parental instinct of the adults caused them to return again and again to the nest to protect their young, so that the extermination of a whole colony, including the young that starved to death, was an easy task. Needless to say, no species of wildlife could survive this kind of treatment. The slaughter was a severe indictment of American womanhood, as it was their vanity for personal adornment that brought it about. In order to have their hats trimmed with the plumes of a bird, they were willing to see the extermination of one of America's most stately and beautiful birds. We now have the American Egret to give pleasure to bird observers in the state of Iowa, because of the determined and continued efforts of the National Audubon Society. The Society not only placed protecting wardens in the remaining breeding grounds in Florida's

\*The American Egret in Iowa, by James Hodges. Iowa Acad. Sci., vol. 54, 1947, pp. 317-323

everglades, but what was more important, a campaign of education was started to acquaint the American woman with what she was doing to the birds in wearing feathers on her hats. This campaign was successful.

### *Status of the American Egret During Early Days in Iowa*

Mr. Hodges begins his historical notes with the late eighties, which was the beginning of the plume-hunting days and the period of scarcity. More accurately to set the date of the population drop, I should like to quote Frank M. Chapman, the quotation being written in 1895: "Tourists who went to Florida prior to 1880 have told me of prairies white with egrets, of bushy islands glistening in the sun like new snow banks. Now you may look for miles along a like shore and perhaps in the distance see a solitary egret."

The writer can draw on his personal experience during this period of scarcity. About the time that Anderson was writing his "Birds of Iowa", in which he describes the egret as an irregular or casual visitor to the state, I took my vacations fishing on the Mississippi River in northeast Iowa with Grandfather Price. Grandfather Price was a Civil War veteran and had lived on the river most of his life. While we fished I would watch the Great Blue Herons feeding, and grandfather would tell me about the large numbers of "white cranes" that he would see on the river when he was younger, but at that time they seemed to have disappeared. While not old enough to see the early period of abundance, I have seen the scarcity, and now, the return to almost abundance.

For the purpose of continuity I would like to quote some of the older records that we have of this bird in Iowa. These records indicating the previous population, before plume-hunting, are important as it is quite evident that the American Egret is a bird that is recovering territory previously occupied in the state. I am quoting from the historical records given in Anderson's "Birds of Iowa." Coues in his history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition states that a great many white herons were observed in Badger lake, located in what is now Monona County along the Missouri River. J. A. Allen and John Krider state that the bird was found as far west as the streams of Iowa. I would like to call particular attention to the record on the Missouri River as it will be commented on later.

### *Present Status of the American Egret in Iowa*

As stated previously, the summer vacation home of the egret par excellence is the Mississippi valley. In the state of Iowa I feel that Mr. Hodges' paper minimizes the American Egret population. Individual reports from counties located off the Mississippi River do not mean much in judging the summer population of the state, as the bird is rather particular as to its habitat. Along the Mississippi River in northeast Iowa, in years that we call good egret years, the American Egret is the most plentiful large water bird.

Along the Missouri River this bird is only a casual visitor and the reason is plain. Because of man's action this river is only fluid mud with few tree-bordered sloughs. We therefore question whether the numbers reported by Coues will ever come again to that area.

The visits of the American Egret to Iowa are irregularly cyclic, probably due to food conditions. In my observations of this bird for the past five years in the sloughs of the upper Mississippi, I have noted a very distinct difference in the egret population during different years. The year 1947, a year of high water, showed a marked decrease in numbers, but the year 1948 was a banner year for numbers. On traveling through the sloughs in 1948 I would estimate an average of one bird every 500 yards, and some sloughs where feeding was good were peppered with these birds. The smaller sloughs in



central Iowa also showed their proportion of the birds, but in small numbers and probably not residents of the area for the whole summer.

In observing the egret on the Mississippi River I have noted that the big-number years were associated with low water in the sloughs. Because of this low water the shallow area available for wading was greater, which meant a greater food supply. This may be the reason for the increased numbers. The Great Blue Heron did not show any increase in numbers in these years. This can be explained as the Great Blue is a breeder and would not change its location as quickly as a wanderer such as the egret, the latter bird selecting the best feeding locations over considerable areas.

#### *Post-Nuptial Wanderings or Migrations of the American Egret*

Mr. Hodges in his paper gives a heading of spring and fall migration. I think that this terminology is somewhat misleading, as the movement of the bird in Iowa is not a migration in the sense that movements of birds from the south to the north for breeding is a migration. The American Egrets that we see are the young raised in the south and the adults that are taking a summer vacation after their breeding duties in the south. The late summer wanderings are similar to the wanderings of other species which indulge in this habit after raising their young. In fact, it is quite a prevalent trait with birds. As previously stated, food conditions caused by water levels seem to determine the area selected for the vacation. In 1947 when the egret was scarce in northeast Iowa, reports from the Ohio valley and the southern great lakes indicated they were numerous.

The term migration can be applied to the passage through southern Iowa to their ultimate summer home in the Mississippi River valley in northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota. If another breeding heronry should become established in the state, we would then have a true spring and fall migration.

In northeast Iowa the arrival date is about the middle of July with the numbers increasing into early August. In what can be termed normal years most of the birds have left by the middle of September, but the leaving date is much modified by climatic conditions. In the egret year of 1948 the last flock numbering 84 birds left on November 2. It should be borne in mind that this year was characterized by a very mild November.

#### *Breeding in Iowa*

The last breeding heronry in the state was abandoned by the egrets several years ago. This was at Sabula, and the writer has no information of any other breeding records in the state. However, with the marked increase in the numbers in post-nuptial migration, and last year's record of the egret breeding on islands in Lake Erie, we should not be at all surprised to hear of breeding again established in the southern part of the state.

#### *Habits of the American Egret in Iowa*

Mr. Hodges gives an extensive account of his observations of the habits of this bird, and I can substantiate his remarks from my own observations but should like to make some additions.

Arrival from the south, and also the leaving in the fall, is in small flocks of from 50 to 70 birds. After arrival they will remain in flocks for a short time, roosting together in adjacent trees; dead trees seem to be preferred. They usually separate and feed and roost alone, but if feeding conditions are good in any particular slough, they will again collect in flocks, some of which are quite large. Thus we again have community roosting, but separation begins as the food in that particular area is depleted. In the fall, on leaving for the south, the egrets again collect in flocks for three or four days before the departure.

The method of feeding and the types of food are essentially the same as all large herons. The egret's method of hunting crayfish is rather interesting. In the small land-locked sloughs which begin to get dry and become shallow in the summer, we may see a flock of egrets flying in and spotting all the slough with their white forms. Then begins an industrious probing of the mud in the shallow water, and the crayfish are taken in numbers. It must not take long to absorb the food in these small sloughs, as the birds do not remain longer than half a day and return to the larger sloughs connected with the river which they have taken as their summer home. In these larger sloughs the food seems to be largely frogs and occasionally small fish. The fisherman need not become alarmed for the safety of his game fish for the egret does not frequent the weed beds in which young bass, pike, croppies and sunfish take shelter.

The tendency of the larger herons and egrets to associate with one another on post-nuptial migrations is probably a function of colony nesting. In north-eastern Iowa we find the American Egret feeding and roosting with the Great Blue Heron, but greatly outnumbering this species. The increase of the numbers of American Egrets in the state has not only brought a thrill to Iowa bird watchers, but has brought them a greater thrill in the bird associates of the egrets. These are the Little Blue Heron and the Snowy Egret. The writer has seen the Little Blue Heron in a flock of egrets several times, though this bird can be considered rare. I have also tentatively identified the Snowy Egret but could not make a positive identification. Mr. Musgrove (December, 1948, Iowa Bird Life) made a positive identification of the Snowy Egret in a flock of American Egrets in Polk County.

The writer would like to urge caution in identifying the Little Blue Heron and the Snowy Egret on the basis of size difference only. In his observation of a number of American Egrets in northeast Iowa he has noted considerable difference in the size of birds that were undoubtedly American Egrets. This difference in size can be accounted for, I believe, by difference in age. Older writers speak of the post-nuptial wanderings being confined to young birds only, but to this we can not agree, as both young and adults are present at this time. Another cause for doubt in identification is the difference in bill color in young and adult birds. The bill of the nestling egret is dark, and it must take some time for the young birds to acquire the bright orange bill of the adults. A number of the young birds seen had distinctly darker bills than the adults, but all had a trace of orange.

### *Molting*

Mr. Hodges concludes, from his observations, that before the American Egret arrives in Iowa the post-nuptial molt has been concluded. I agree with this, as my observations of a goodly number of these birds have failed to show a single bird with any remains of the nuptial plumes.

\* \* \*

To the bird watchers of eastern and central Iowa the increase of the American Egrets seen must be gratifying. While doubting the probability of seeing greatly increased numbers in the Missouri River valley, I hope that I may be wrong and that ultimately we shall see this bird in increased numbers in that area, for it is evident that the egret is rapidly recovering the range that it formerly occupied in its post-nuptial wanderings.

*Coincidental with Dr. Stewart's article on the Egret in Iowa, is the publication of a paper, "The American Egret in Wisconsin", by Frank H. King, in the January, 1949, issue of the "Passenger Pigeon", quarterly of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. This is an important and interesting article of 15 pages, with 4 photographs, 3 tables, a map and a bibliography of 32 titles.—Ed.*

## THE 1948 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS IN IOWA

Compiled by FRED J. PIERCE

The 1948 Christmas bird census yielded the largest number of species of any year since we began printing the tabulated Iowa reports. The 1948 total was 79 species, 4 species larger than the totals of 75 in 1939 and 1946 (see totals for the 10-year period in "Iowa Bird Life," March, 1948, issue, page 4). In spite of cold and inclement weather during Christmas week, 96 observers at 18 stations displayed their unfailing enthusiasm for the Christmas bird count, and took to the fields and woods to roll up the largest number of species we have had thus far. The announced dates were December 20 to 30. The Cedar Rapids census was taken on December 19. We had room in our tabulation and included three lists made on January 1.

The tabulated report gives a complete picture of winter bird life in Iowa in late December, and a careful study of the list and comparison with censuses published in previous years will bring out some very interesting data. In 1948 25 species were reported at one station only; 10 species were reported at two stations only; just 8 species appeared on all 18 lists.

We have given the family name of Chickadee on our list, since the Black-capped and Long-tailed Chickadees are seldom differentiated in the field. The Horned Lark is listed without subspecies classification, for, while most observers list the bird as the Prairie, the Hoyt's Horned Lark is known to be a common winter resident, and the Northern Horned Lark also occurs in our state in winter. It is customary to list the Rock Dove only where it is living in a natural state. We have one such record (Newton), so this species is included in the list.

Data on place, time, weather and the observers who reported in the 1948 census are given below.

1. BACKBONE STATE PARK (Delaware County): Dec. 26; 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Clear; about 4 in. week-old snow on ground; frequent open places in Maquoketa River; strong S wind; temp.  $-2^{\circ}$  at start,  $10^{\circ}$  at noon,  $15^{\circ}$  at return; about 4 miles on foot, 50 by car; trip included an auto ride from Winthrop to the park and return (return by different road), with roadside list included in the census. Observers together most of the time. M. L. Jones, Earl Freeman, Paul Pierce, F. J. Pierce.

2. CEDAR FALLS (Snag Creek, Union Bridge, Josh Higgins Park, Hartman Reserve; river bottoms 40%, upland forest 20%, savannas 30%, fields 10%): Dec. 28; 8 to 12 a.m., 1 to 4 p.m. Cloudy 4 hours, drizzle 3 hours, snow 1 hour; 1-2 in. snow on ground; watercourses half frozen over; wind ESE, 5 m.p.h.; temp.  $32^{\circ}$ ; total hours 8 ( $6\frac{1}{2}$  on foot,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in car), observer hours, 32; total miles, 12 on foot, 35 by car. Five observers, but in one party; 4 in a.m., 4 in p.m. Martin L. Grant, Mrs. Russell Rugg, Russell Hays, C. W. Robertson, Frances Crouter.

3. CEDAR RAPIDS (Cedar Lake, Cedar River, Prairie Creek, Lake McBride, Swan Lake, Amana Lake, Ellis Park, Bever Park, Manhattan, upper and lower River Road; open woodlands, woodlands along streams, farm fields and pastures, lake areas, roadsides): Dec. 19; 7:45 a.m. to 12:30, 1:30 to 5 p.m. Cloudy with visibility fair; streams open; temp.  $20^{\circ}$  to  $25^{\circ}$ ; aggregate distance, all parties, 35 miles on foot, 85 by car. Observers in 3 parties. Phyllis Brown, Judy Chandler, Esther Copp, Emma Doornink, Mary Johnson, Paul McGuffin, Jean Menzel, Dr. Alfred Meyer, Duane Nesetrit, Lucile Olinger, Rose Richards, Lillian Serbousek, Dr. and Mrs. Robt. Vane, Mary Walker, Myra Willis.

4. DAVENPORT (Credit Island, Giddings woods, Fairmount Cemetery, Holy Family Cemetery, McMannus woods, fairgrounds): Dec. 27; 9:30 a.m. to



3:30 p.m. Ground mostly bare with snow on northern exposures only; river 90% frozen; wind W, brisk but infrequent; temp. 26° at start, 28° at return. Norwood Hazard, Richard Schaefer.

Two Killdeers were flushed from the edge of Credit Island harbor near the causeway; they were but 25 ft. away and were readily identified by call and plumage. The Snow Buntings were seen on the lower end of Credit Island, where a wing dam, sparsely overgrown with weeds, juts out into the river. The birds flew into this area in two separate flocks, several minutes apart, and did not intermingle at any time. Field marks, including white wing patches, and clear, tinkling notes given in flight, were carefully noted.

5. DAVENPORT (Giddings woods, Credit Island, McMannus woods, Holy Family Cemetery, Stubbs woods, fairgrounds, Cedar St. creek woods, Fedj woods and park): Jan. 1; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Most of Mississippi River open; light wind; temp. 25° at start, 35° at return; 14 miles on foot. James Hodges.

6. DES MOINES (Fisher's Lake, Sycamore Park, Dove Woods, Pine Hill Cemetery, 28th St. Sanctuary, Impounding Reservoir, Walnut Woods State Park, Kinglet Woods, Charles Sing Denman Woods, Ashworth Park, Wakonsa): Dec. 26; 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Clear; 2 in. snow on ground; water frozen but some open water in Beaver and Walnut Creeks and in Impounding Reservoir; wind SSE, 7 m.p.h., to SSW, 10 m.p.h.; temp. 0° to 22°; total party hours, 32 (27½ on foot, 4½ in cars); total party miles, 122 (17 on foot, 105 in cars). Twenty observers in 5 parties. J. P. Moore, Bradley McMain, Helen Peasley, Gladys Haskell, Lester Haskell, Toni Wendelburg, Oliver Graves, Ruth Binsfeld, Mary Ellen Warters, Dennis Warters, Joe Brown, Florence Chamberlain, Ruth Chapman, Dorothy Anderson, W. H. Brown, Lowell Chamberlain, Olivia McCabe, Mrs. Pettit, Elizabeth Peck, Bruce Stiles.

7. DUBUQUE (Linwood and Mt. Calvary Cemeteries, Eagle Point Park, City Island, Mississippi River sloughs in Wisconsin; open fields 10%, pine woodlands 15%, deciduous woodlands 35%, river sloughs 40%): Dec. 26; 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Clear; 4 in. week-old snow on ground; river open below dam; wind 15 m.p.h.; temp. -2° to 18°; total hours, 7½ (6 on foot, 1½ in car); total miles, 12 (7 on foot, 5 by car). Observers together. George and Frieda Crossley, Howard Hintz (Dubuque Audubon Club).

8. GRINNELL (Blue Point woods, Jones Grove, several Crow roosts north of city, country roads NE of city): Dec. 31; 9 a.m. to 12, 2 to 5:30 p.m. Cloudy; 4 or 5 in. snow on ground; cold SW wind; temp. 28°; total miles, 4 on foot, 50 by car. Observers together. Conrad Schallou, Dennis Ritter, Graeme George, Robt. Plum, W. A. Johnson, E. A. Kurth (Grinnell Bird Club).

The Mallard listed was in a farmer's yard, having flown there last fall in an emaciated condition and refused to leave.

9. INDEPENDENCE (grounds of State Hospital, woods along Wapsipicon River between this city and Quasqueton, and roadside list): Jan. 1; 9:30 a.m. to 12, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Clear in a.m., cloudy in p.m.; 4 in. snow on ground; no wind; temp. 10° at start, 22° at return; about 3 miles on foot, 30 by car. Observers together. Paul Pierce, F. J. Pierce; addition of Earl Freeman in p.m.

Two White-winged Crossbills were observed in spruce shelter-belt on State Hospital grounds in forenoon. They were observed at a distance of 3 ft. as they fed on the ground, and just overhead in the trees; they were very tame and allowed observation as long as was desired.

10. LAMONI (down Big Creek for ½ mile south of city): Dec. 24; 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Cloudy, starting to snow at return; 1 in. snow on ground; temp. 18° at start, 22° at return. Mrs. W. C. DeLong.

The Rusty Blackbirds were seen near enough to identify without the aid of glasses. A cornfield, machine-picked, had much cracked corn where the

(Continued on page 10)

	1. Backbone State Park	2. Cedar Falls	3. Cedar Rapids	4. Davenport (Hazard)	5. Davenport (Hodges)	6. Des Moines	7. Dubuque	8. Grinnell	9. Independ- ence	10. Lamoni	11. Ledges State Park	12. Mt. Pleasant	13. Mt. Vernon	14. Newton	15. Ottumwa	16. Sioux City	17. Tama	18. Woodward
Pied-billed Grebe			1		3	4												
Canada Goose														20*		1	152	
Snow Goose						4000		1*			7							
Mallard		1	145		4	25												
Black Duck					12	12												
Pintail					25	25												
Redhead Duck					30	4												
Ring-necked Duck					1	1												
Lesser Scaup			5	34	2	12	4											
American Golden-eye					3	2												
Ruddy Duck			1	41	3	32	3						5					
American Merganser																		
Red-breasted Merganser					1													
Go-hawk																		
Sharp-shinned Hawk													1					
Cooper's Hawk		1	1	1	1	6	2	13	1		1			1	5		1	4
Red-tailed Hawk	2		9			25								1				
Red-shouldered Hawk		2	4			1								1				
Broad-winged Hawk					1	1		3	2		1						1	
Rough-legged Hawk	2	1	2		2	1							1*	2				2
Hald Eagle			2			1												
Marsh Hawk								1										
Prairie Falcon																		
Sparrow Hawk	1		1			3		1			1				1		1*	3
Bob-white		1	18		1	11		8						10	1			10
King-necked Pheasant	32				1	1		204	9		11			2	10		2	3
American Coot			1			12												
Killdeer				2*								4						
Wilson's Snipe																		
Herring Gull			2	25	50													
Ring-billed Gull					25									2*				
Rock Dove								8			8							
Mourning Dove			9			2			1									1
Screech Owl																		
Great Horned Owl			1	1	1	4												1
Harrad Owl		3																
Short-eared Owl						3												
Saw-whet Owl	1											1						
Hooded Kingfisher																		
Flicker	1																	
Pileated Woodpecker	2			2	2	10	2	5		2	2	5		11	1	37	3	3



# CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS

	1. Backbone State Park	2. Cedar Falls	3. Cedar Rapids	4. Davenport (Hazard)	5. Davenport (Hodges)	6. Des Moines	7. Dubuque	8. Grinnell	9. Independence	10. Lamoni	11. Ledges State Park	12. Mt. Pleasant	13. Mt. Vernon	14. Newton	15. Ottumwa	16. Sioux City	17. Tama	18. Woodward
Red-bellied Woodpecker	2	3	11	2	2	17	3	4	1	2	3	11	3	4	3	3	2	1
Red-headed Woodpecker			5															6
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker																		
Harry Woodpecker	1	3	9	18	2	6	1	2	2	3	4	4	1	8	2	8	4	3
Downy Woodpecker	2	13	33		11	67	2	14	2	5	6	16	6	15	14	21	8	12
Horned Lark			12					31			2	17	10	8	50			3
Blue Jay	24	12	35	5	12	55	9	18	22	3	10	17	10	8	12	6	8	3
Crow	36	50	33	5	12	51	5	1276	18	1	1000	20	6	12	18	1587	12	5
Chickadee	20	23	109	10	20	286	19	17	4	9	30	27	15	20	38	47	46	8
Tufted Titmouse	2	4	8	4	2	37	6			6	8	7	3	8	5	20	2	5
White-breasted Nuthatch	3	12	34	7	6	32	1	13	1	2	2	1	10	4	3	20	2	5
Red-breasted Nuthatch																		
Brown Creeper			8	2	4	10	2	4										
Winter Wren			11									1	1					
Carolina Wren																		
Robin																		
Bluebird																		
Golden-crowned Kinglet																		
Cedar Waxwing																		
Northern Shrike																		
Starling	30	8	70	2	3	222	7	76	20		42	57	27	6	23	61	45	135
English Sparrow	100	250	250		36	560	141	172	20	22	100	139	73	375	200	554	90	17
Meadowlark	1					30		3										14
Western Meadowlark																		
Rusty Blackbird																		
Bronzed Grackle																		
Cardinal	3	9	42	4	8	159	3	8	4	7	12	24	25	40	10	32	18	4
Purple Finch		3				6	1				3	27			28			
Common Redpoll					2													
Pine Siskin																		
Goldfinch		4	43	1	4	35	6				3	36	40	9	150	12	27	7
White-winged Crossbill									2*									
Arctic Towhee																		
State-colored Junco	50	65	63	71	30	373	14	21	40	19	100	52	8	325	200	46	45	175
Tree Sparrow	2	45	122	25	10	615	38	114	1	132	160	15	3	475	300	5*	14	27
Harris's Sparrow																		
Song Sparrow		3	3	2		32	1	3		7		1		1	4		1	2
Snow Bunting				35*														
Number of Species	21	25	35	23	34	45	27	30	17	17	28	22	21	26	36	26	23	24
Number of Observers	4	5	16	2	1	20	3	6	3	1	2	4	4	7	2	11	2	3

\* See data under station in body of article.

Total Iowa list . . . . . 79 species.

tractor had run over the ears. The Mourning Doves and Rusties were feeding on this corn. At first the Rusties were thought to be Starlings, but a near view revealed their true identity.

11. LEDGES STATE PARK (a drive from the Ledges to Boone, Pilot Mound, Ogden and return, with short hikes chiefly in prairie and weedy areas; woodland birds chiefly those at feeding station): Dec. 20; 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Light clouds all day; 1 in. new snow on ground; light NW wind; temp. 26° to 42°; about 4 miles on foot, 40 by car. Observers together part of the time. Mr. and Mrs. M. L. Jones.

12. MOUNT PLEASANT (SW of city to Big Creek in a.m., near Oakland Mills in p.m.): Dec. 30; 7 to 11 a.m., 1 to 4 p.m. Clear; almost no wind; temp. 6° at start, 25° at noon; 4 miles on foot in a.m., 15 miles by car in p.m. Helen Hallowell, Shirley Statler, Joe Schaffner, Roy Ollivier.

13. MOUNT VERNON (center of town south to Ivanhoe, SE of Ivanhoe along Cedar River, Dark Hollow and Spring Hollow in Palisades-Kepler State Park; open farmland 20%, deciduous woodland 75%, town 5%): Dec. 27; 7:30 a.m. to 12:15; 1:15 to 4 p.m. Cloudy; 1 in. snow on ground; Cedar River frozen except at dam; wind W, 1-7 m.p.h.; temp. 27° to 37° at noon; total miles, 10. Observers together. John C. W. Bliese, Chester W. Quimby, J. David Ennis, J. Harold Ennis.

The Bald Eagle was observed carefully with 7x50 binoculars. The white tail and white crown of this adult bird could be clearly seen without glasses. I have one other Bald Eagle record for this area during the last 10 years, also in December.—J. H. E.

14. NEWTON (Westwood Park, south along Cherry Creek to South Skunk River bottom; open farmland 40%, timbered river bottom 40%, creek shrubbery 20%): Jan. 1; 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Overcast; 1-2 in. soft snow on ground; all water frozen except for a few short channels in Skunk River; wind WSW, 1-7 m.p.h.; temp. 20° to 22°; total miles, 22 (6 by car, 16 on foot). Observers together. John Paul Moore, Konnie Yoshinaga, Bradley McMain, Bob Little, Paul Casper, James Gaylor, Ralph Agar (Newton Bird Club).

The two Rock Doves listed were living in a tree, under natural conditions.

15. OTTUMWA (city, Memorial Park, Hamilton Park, Academy, Community Gardens, Cliffland, Monkey Mountain road, old Eldon road, other areas in Wapello County): Dec. 26; 9 a.m. to 12, 1 to 4 p.m. Clear; 3 in. snow on ground; streams frozen over; light NW wind; 10° at start, 30° at return; 3 miles on foot, 43 by car. Wm. H. Hoskins, Norman P. Crowe.

The 20 Snow Geese were seen along the Des Moines River about a half-mile west of Eldon. They were near enough so that the black wing tips were easily seen.

16. SIOUX CITY (Brower's Lake, Brown's Lake and woods and state park area adjoining, wooded area south of Hover's Island, Morningside Nurseries, West Side hills, town area, Riverside Park, confluence area of Big Sioux and Missouri Rivers, Riverside woods, Big Sioux River road to Stone Park, Stone Park, Plum Creek Road, Talbot Road, Logan Park; hilly deciduous woodland with pine and cedar growth 50%, river and lake country with wooded lowlands 30%, open lowlands 10%, open hills 5%, town 5%): Dec. 26; 7:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. Lightly overcast in a.m., clear in p.m.; 8-10 in. crust-ed snow on ground; Missouri River open in main channel, Big Sioux River open below gas plant, lakes frozen over; wind SE, 5-7 m.p.h.; temp. 0° to 22° in mid-p.m.; total party hours, 48; total party miles, 154 (128 by car, 26 on foot). Eleven observers in 6 parties. Mr. and Mrs. Herrold Asmussen, W. W. Barrett, Mrs. E. A. Emery, Mr. and Mrs. Jean Laffoon, Zell C. Lee, Bob Nickolson, Dr. and Mrs. John L. Schott, Carl Wellhausen (Sioux City Bird Club).

The Prairie Falcon and Harris's Sparrows were observed and identified by Barrett; the Arctic Towhee by Schott.

17. TAMA (auto trip of 40 miles through wooded areas and farm lands): Dec. 25; 9 a.m. to 12, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. Clear; 2 in. snow on ground; Iowa River partially open; wind N, rather strong; temp. 20°. Mr. and Mrs. W. G. MacMartin.

18. WOODWARD (through brush patches, draws and timber on foot, beside brushy fence rows and through open country by auto): Dec. 25. Clear; wind E, 2 m.p.h.; 5 miles on foot, 57 by car. Observers together. Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Guthrie, Richard A. Guthrie.

## T. C. STEPHENS — AN APPRECIATION

In looking back over the 26 years of my acquaintance and friendship with Dr. Stephens, a great many things are remembered. I first knew him in the fall of 1922, when I went to Morningside College as a freshman. I had had some correspondence with him on ornithological matters off and on for two or three years before meeting him, and I went to the school with the primary idea of taking his course in ornithology. Before I got through I had decided on a biology minor, which necessitated courses in elementary biology, vertebrate zoology, and comparative anatomy. In all his teaching he was exacting without being arrogant or disagreeable, sympathetic with all attempts

at genuine research, always in the role of kindly counselor or guide. I, as an amateur ornithologist, had many days in the field with him, where he was an ideal companion. He insisted on accuracy in field identifications, and was ever a thorn in the flesh of the "would-be", who goes out in the field to see whatever he wants to see.

Dr. Stephens' interest in research and the additional accumulation of a store of scientific knowledge never diminished during his lifetime, and only three weeks before his death I had a letter from him telling of his work last summer at the Lakeside Laboratory. He looked forward year after year to his summer work at the laboratory.

Scientist though he was, and a serious one, he had his lighter side, which was exhibited through a dry wit which appreciated thoroughly a good humorous story or a practical joke. I never knew him to become hilarious, but I well remember the quiet enjoyment he had in the antics of a group of students on a



DR. T. C. STEPHENS  
in a field trip in 1938, photographed by  
Bruce F. Stiles.



field trip with him, after a morning spent in the serious study of birds, when lunch time would come and there would be a general relaxation.

He had a genuine interest in the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, and I well remember the writing of letters in which he and Walter Rosen and I indulged during the winter of 1922-23 which brought about the meeting in Ames in February, when the Union was organized. So it was with a distinct sense of loss that word of his death came to me last November. I shall miss him much.—CHAS. J. SPIKER.

## HIGHWAY MORTALITY OF THE ENGLISH SPARROW, SOME COMMON BIRDS AND OTHER VERTEBRATES

By JOHN D. GOODMAN

Mercer University  
MACON, GEORGIA

To the motorist and vacationer there is no more common sight in spring and summer months than that of dead birds, mammals, and reptiles littering the main highways of our nation from coast to coast. Much can be learned from a study of such forms as to their abundance, distribution, and extent of range. This is especially valuable in the study of forms that may be locally abundant, but which occupy scattered and somewhat restricted areas.

On August 25, 1946, the writer left Ann Arbor, Michigan, traveling to Iowa by bicycle. Cycling, though strenuous in some respects, has its advantages over motorcar travel from the standpoint of ease in making stops, observations, and notations of the animals observed enroute. Added to this is the hazard the motorist creates in coming to a stop on one of our main highways with no more valid reason than that he got out to look at a flattened snake on the highway (should some patrolman question him)! Finally, the cyclist is in a position to notice objects too small to claim the attention of the person in an automobile.

Below is a tabulation of the DOR (dead on road) specimens encountered between Ann Arbor and Benton Harbor, Michigan, via Highway No. 12. Total time on road was slightly under 15 hours. Average speed was approximately 10 m.p.h. Total distance 152 miles. Dates, August 25 and 26, 1946.

### BIRDS

ENGLISH SPARROW, <i>Passer domesticus</i> .....	2,128*
GOLDFINCH, <i>Spinus tristis</i> .....	16
ROBIN, <i>Turdus migratorius</i> .....	16
CRESTED FLYCATCHER, <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i> .....	2
R. N. PHEASANT, <i>Phasianus c. torquatus</i> .....	2
CHICKEN, <i>Gallus domesticus</i> .....	2
SCREECH OWL, <i>Otus asio</i> .....	2
HAWKS, (Unidentified remains) .....	2

### MAMMALS

MUSKRAT, <i>Ondatra zibethica</i> .....	76
RABBIT, <i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> .....	8
FOX SQUIRREL, <i>Sciurus niger rufiventer</i> .....	8
MOLE, <i>Scalopus aquaticus</i> .....	6
MEADOW MOUSE, <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> .....	4
NORWAY RAT, <i>Rattus norvegicus</i> .....	4
BROWN BAT, <i>Eptesicus fuscus</i> .....	2

### AMPHIBIANS

BULLFROG, <i>Rana catesbeiana</i> .....	2
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\* The figure for English Sparrows is not an actual count, but an estimate based on an average of fourteen birds per mile for 30 miles.

REPTILES

BLANDINGS TURTLE, <i>Emys blandingii</i> .....	90
E. PAINTED TURTLE, <i>Chrysemys marginata</i> .....	35
SNAPPING TURTLE, <i>Chelydra serpentina</i> .....	12
GARTER SNAKE, <i>Thamnophis s. sirtalis</i> .....	6
BLUE RACER, <i>Coluber constrictor flaviventris</i> .....	2
SNAKES (unidentified) .....	12

No attempt was made to keep a record of the locality in which these forms were tabulated, although such a procedure would be highly advisable, and would make the material of much greater scientific value. Such notations as the type of roadside habitat, proximity to water, towns, buildings, etc., should be taken at the site of the DOR specimen. Schmidt and Davis give a convenient method for recording such data on page 63 of their "Field Book of Snakes."

A statistical treatment of such data secured from DOR specimens is difficult. Probably many more nocturnal animals cross the highway at night than do animals in a corresponding number of daylight hours, but greater daytime traffic would undoubtedly cause a greater toll on the latter group. Another factor which must be considered is the variable length of time which an animal carcass remains identifiable. It is believed by the writer that the majority of the larger birds and mammals were killed in the preceding three weeks, while the smaller forms are less durable and were probably only three or four days old. (If that is the case the figure on English Sparrows killed on our hundreds of miles of highways for a year would be astronomical)! Turtles, on the other hand, are exceptionally good for this study as their crushed plastron and carapace will remain for weeks.

It is hoped that Iowa birders and naturalists will become aware of the value of such a study and can perhaps contribute some valuable data on this subject in the future. It would seem that the highways are of significance in the ecology of some of our native songbirds and other animals.

## SPRING CONVENTION TO BE HELD AT MCGREGOR MAY 14 AND 15

The Dubuque Audubon Club is sponsoring our annual convention this year, and instead of holding it at Dubuque, they decided to give our members the opportunity of enjoying a bird territory which nearly everyone wants to visit if he has not already done so—the McGregor region. The Dubuque Club is pleased to announce the convention dates of Saturday and Sunday, May 14 and 15, 1949. The convention will be held on McGregor Heights, above the city of McGregor, where the scenery includes the broad expanse of the Mississippi River and scores of heavily wooded bluffs spread out in delightful panorama below.

Weather permitting, this year's convention will stress outdoor field trips so that visitors from inland may take full advantage of the varied bird habitat to be found in this area. Plans for the program are now in the early preparation stages, but it may be that business and technical sessions will be held only in connection with the various meals. We hope to have an ornithologist of national prominence give the banquet address. President Ayres asks those who wish (or are willing) to present papers on the program to communicate with him (at 208 East 2nd St., Ottumwa, Iowa).

The McGregor region, which includes the country extending northward to the mouth of the Yellow river and Waukon Junction, is one of the finest bird territories in the state of Iowa. Its possibilities, especially in the migra-

tion season, are almost unlimited, and we can expect a large list and many surprises.

The country just north of Waukon Junction has contained the nesting site of at least one pair of Duck Hawks for a number of years. The sight of the Peregrine Falcons circling over the bluffs is worth a long trip, while the wild cry of these birds will remain long in memory.

Just south of Waukon Junction is the habitat where Pierce and Allert have every year found the Kentucky Warbler. The Carolina Wren is often found there also, and at the mouth of the Yellow River Prothonotaries and other warblers are numerous. The McGregor region is also the year-around home of the Ruffed Grouse and the Pileated Woodpecker. We suggest that our members read these two articles by Oscar P. Allert in "Iowa Bird Life":

"Notes on Certain Raptores in Allamakee, Clayton and Dubuque Counties, Iowa," September, 1939, issue, pp. 34-36.

"Notes on Distinctive Bird Residents of Northeastern Iowa," December, 1941, issue, pp. 70-72.

A few miles southwest of McGregor, in the ghost town of National, is the former home of Miss Althea R. Sherman, Iowa's distinguished ornithologist, where may be seen the famous Chimney Swift tower in which she studied the habitats of this bird over a very long period of years (see the "Althea R. Sherman Memorial Issue" of "Iowa Bird Life", June, 1943, issue, pp. 13-36, with nine illustrations from photographs).

We believe this will be one of our finest meetings and we hope every member will keep the dates of May 14 and 15 well in mind and make a particular effort to attend our first convention in northeastern Iowa. We are sure you will be amply repaid. Members of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union will soon receive information relative to the reservations for lodging and meals, which will be arranged by the Dubuque Audubon Club, as well as a copy of the program and other details.



A SCENE NEAR MCGREGOR, IOWA

This view shows the Mississippi River and its many islands, looking upstream from a bluff near McGregor. Reprinted from "Up the Mississippi", by Fred J. Pierce, in NATURE NOTES (Peoria, Ill.), September, 1939, issue, pp. 172-175.



## A NOTE ON MCGREGOR, IOWA

In a pocket in the high bluffs along the Mississippi River lies the town of McGregor. Crowded into a narrow ravine it is shadowed by towering ridges on the north and south. The main street leads directly to the river's bank and the others—usually short and steep—follow no regular plan. Many of the residences and business buildings abut on the stone cliffs. Houses perch on rocky shelves. In spite of being cramped into so small an area McGregor does not have a narrowed appearance for, at the wide end of the ravine, the great Mississippi—with its many islands, its tributary Wisconsin River, and the wide valleys on the other side—flows at its very door, in view from all parts of the town.

This is the gateway to what is locally known as the "Little Switzerland of America", a region of rocky hills and bluffs in northeastern Iowa that is strangely different from the rest of the gently rolling Iowa countryside. This area escaped the leveling influence of the successive glacial periods that converted the sedimentary rocks of the rest of the State into rolling prairies. From the southern boundary of Minnesota to Clinton the hills bordering the river rise from 300 to 600 feet. The steep bluffs are cut by many ravines, and rapid streams, springfed, empty every few miles into the Mississippi. The northern section of this strip of rugged country is almost 50 miles wide, but south of McGregor it contracts to a narrow band extending only a few miles west of the river.

As a result of the inaccessibility of part of the region, wild life is abundant. Much of the fauna once common in Iowa, and now hunted by man and driven by encroaching civilization, has found a natural refuge among the hills and on the islands. Wolves, foxes, lynx, bobcat, and an occasional deer, making his way over the ice from Wisconsin—in fact all the living things the Indians knew, with the exception of the buffalo, elk, and panther—are still to be found throughout the section.

The Mississippi River is one of the main highways for waterfowl migration and, as a result, many are seen in the lakes, sloughs and tributary streams along its course . . . The Winneshiek Bottoms, as the islands between Lansing and Guttenberg are called, is a natural spawning ground for bass and other game fish . . . Much of the land along the Mississippi River, from a point starting at Bellevue, Iowa, and extending some 117 miles northward, beyond McGregor belongs to the Federal Government. Set aside as the Upper Mississippi River Wild Life Refuge, protected wild life in the tract has increased in numbers since the establishment of the refuge and wood and marshland returned to its natural state.—From "A Guide to McGregor, Iowa", compiled by Federal Writers' Project, W.P.A. of Iowa, published 1933.

### GENERAL NOTES

**Christmas Census at Spirit Lake, Iowa.**—SPIRIT LAKE (and vicinity, all in Iowa): Dec. 26; 6 hours; mostly driving in car. Mallard, 28; Black Duck, 2; Rough-legged Hawk, 1; Sparrow Hawk, 1; Ring-necked Pheasant, 51; Flicker, 2; Hairy Woodpecker, 4; Downy Woodpecker, 10; Horned Lark, 30; Blue Jay, 30; Chickadee, 16; White-breasted Nuthatch, 10; Brown Creeper, 2; total species, 13. We have had a Flicker and Brown Creeper at our feeding station all winter.—FRANK and MARY ROBERTS. (This census was received on February 17, too late for inclusion in our tabulation.—Ed.)

**Blue Grosbeaks' Nest in South Dakota.**—About two miles east of Picketown, South Dakota, in the Lake Andes region, a pair of Blue Grosbeaks built a nest in a plum thicket approximately 4 rods from a frequently traveled dirt highway. This nest, about 4 feet above the ground, had been skillfully

woven of rootlets, dried grasses, fine weed stems and a frayed paper napkin. On August 8, 1948, there were two dead fledglings in the nest and two babies in early feathering stage on branches a foot away from the nest. The parents flitted from thicket to telephone wires where they nervously watched the observers at close range for half an hour. On the other side of this thicket was a nest of the same construction which contained an old Cowbird egg. Apparently the grosbeaks, became wise to the intruder and built another nest. Another male Blue Grosbeak was seen about two miles east of the above nest site as the observers were traveling along the highway.—GERTRUDE WEAVER, Sioux City, Iowa.

**Feeding-station Notes.**—On November 9, 1948, a Pine Siskin spent some time at my bird bath. It came again with a flock of Goldfinches. This is my first record for the Siskin. On December 6 a Robin spent the day at the feeding station—my latest recorded date for the Robin. A very unusual junco came to my station last fall. It was gray like the Slate-colored Junco, but it had a white patch on each cheek and a white band over the back of its neck. For some reason, my juncos left about November 26, and only a single one then appeared for a day's visit. I have sunflower, hemp and canary seeds, suet, bread and corn out at all times.—MRS. J. RAY KING, Grundy Center, Iowa.

**Snow Buntings at Davenport.**—On November 20, 1948, while Norwood Hazard, Rodney Hart and I were on a field trip at Credit Island, we saw approximately 15 Snow Buntings. Next day we saw 20 of these birds at the same place. They were feeding on weed seeds on a wing dam in the Mississippi River and were identified by their flashing wingstripes and other marks. This species is quite rare in this area, and we believe they were driven down here by the storms in the northern country.—ELEANOR DRURY, Davenport, Iowa.

**Snow Buntings in Hamilton County.**—On November 14, 1948, at Little Wall Lake, Hamilton County, a flock of Eastern Snow Buntings were noted as they flew in from the south end of the lake. They crossed the water at a rather low altitude, but as there were other birds in the air at the same time, particularly Lapland Longspurs, the exact number was not ascertained, though the identity was certain. Later in the morning, at the north shore of the lake, three Snow Buntings, in all probability the same birds seen earlier, were observed feeding along the shore. A specimen was collected to establish the identity. It is the earliest record for this species that I have for this state in recent years.—JACK W. MUSGROVE, Dept. of History & Archives, Des Moines, Iowa.

**Notes from a Feeding Station at Red Oak.**—We live in the east part of Red Oak, in a section where there are many large trees. At our home we have one acre fenced, so the birds have very good protection. We have several bird feeders in our yard, including a weather-vane feeder with glass back, a log with holes into which we pound suet, and we tie pieces of suet to tree branches and put feed on the ground, walks and near foundations. We feed a mix of hen and chick scratch, black walnut meats and bread crumbs (the red squirrels get their share of the walnut meats).

We have had many boarders at our station and we very much enjoy watching them. Here is a list of them, with brief comment on several species; we include the names of a few seen flying over. Red-tailed Hawk, 1, call noticed first, then it circled slowly over garden. Hairy Woodpecker, 2 usually together. Downy Woodpecker, 1 to 6, on the suet. Red-bellied Woodpecker, 1, a new boarder this year. Flicker, 2. Blue Jay, 2; very bossy, steal suet. Crow, 1 to 8 flying over morning and evening. Starling, 10 (10 too many!) Slate-colored Junco, 2 to 12; earliest to breakfast, here before daylight. Cardinal,

6 or 8 usually, but we counted 50 in the yard one morning; we have three hackberry trees and the birds love those berries. Tufted Titmouse, 1, a new boarder this winter and eats suet only; we saw 12 in treetops in November but they were gone in ten minutes. Chickadee, 2 to 6. Brown Creeper, 2, also heard several on clear days. White-breasted Nuthatch, 2, at suet only. Red-breasted Nuthatch, 2, at suet only. Robin, 4, on January 10, 1949; these birds were eating the berries of the red cedars just south of our house, one seen on Jan. 9 and four the next day. English Sparrow, 150; the number varies but it is always too many! Tree Sparrow, last year 2 to 6 were seen every day, and they sang so cheerfully; they fed with the other sparrows mostly but flew to the roadside with the juncos; we missed them this year.—MRS. LAWRENCE J. PICKERING, RAMONA C. EDGERTON, Red Oak, Iowa.



AMERICAN WOODCOCK

From a drawing by E. W. Steffen

**Red-backed Sandpiper near Muscatine.**—On November 13, 1948, while on a field trip with Thomas J. Morrissey, a stop was made in the marshy territory immediately adjacent to highway 61 below Muscatine, good bird territory at most times of the year. Our attention was attracted to three medium-sized shore birds which alighted at the edge of a small pond perhaps 50 feet off the highway. The birds permitted us to approach as closely as the moist terrain would allow, and we were able to make detailed observation with 8x binoculars and to come to a positive identification of the birds as Red-backed Sandpipers. We noted the uniform unpatterned gray upper parts, lighter gray plumage below, and particularly the pronounced downward droop of the tip of the bill, which is so marked as to give the effect of almost a hook, rather than a curved bill. The birds were feeding while we observed them. One appeared to be swimming; the others waded or stood on small mounds in



the shallow edge of the pond. They were not at all nervous and it was with some difficulty that we flushed them in order to observe the wing pattern. All three were observed later in the day on a mud bank in a nearly dry pond just outside the city limits of Muscatine. Forbush speaks of this sandpiper as among the latest shorebird migrants, but apparently the usual time of migration lies in October. One Least Sandpiper and a flock of about 15 Wilson's Snipes were observed in the same territory. The presence of shorebirds at so late a date was perhaps due to the general warmth of the fall.—REV. EDWARD C. GREER, Davenport, Iowa.

**American Egrets in Spring at Davenport.**—It may be of interest to place on record some unusually early dates of the American Egret in this area. On April 24, 1948, the first Egret was observed flying over Credit Island, apparently toward a heavily wooded island on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. The same, or another, individual was seen on May 11, and again on May 15, in the same general area—Credit Island or the Wohant marsh, and from that time on one or more were seen on nearly every field trip which included the Mississippi littoral, until the influx of late summer migrants made the birds very common in this vicinity.—REV. EDWARD C. GREER, Davenport, Iowa.

**Pileated Woodpecker in Southeastern Iowa.**—On November 25, 1948, Dick Schaefer and I went to the Wapsie River bottoms, five miles northeast of McCausland, for the express purpose of finding a Pileated Woodpecker. For several hours we trudged our way along the Wapsie, and then after having heard the loud "kuk-kuk-kuk" call at intervals, we saw the dark, crow-sized Pileated Woodpecker fly up to a dead tree and start pecking at it. It gave its call several times, but when we tried to get nearer it took flight and crossed one of the smaller creeks flowing into the river. Arriving on the other side, it was greeted rather inhospitably by a group of Crows, which chased it from its perch several times before it was out of sight. The woodpecker was not at all aggressive, but the Crows seemed to object to its presence. At one time we heard a second bird's call and later we thought we saw another Pileated but we were not near enough to be sure. On November 19, while hunting in the same area, Dick Schaefer saw the Pileated and heard its call several times.—NORWOOD HAZARD, Davenport, Iowa.

**A Domesticated Canada Goose.**—Near Grinnell there is a farm where a male Canada Goose stopped four years ago and is still there. Two or three years ago the farmer mated him with a domestic grey goose and succeeded in raising one gosling. The gosling, when grown, looked like the gander and when killed and eaten tasted the same as wild goose. The gander Canada Goose is very peaceful except in the breeding season, when he flies about the farm and goes on a rampage. Last spring he killed two small pigs that happened to get too near to him. The farmer usually keeps him locked up for several weeks during this season in the spring.—E. A. KURTH, Grinnell, Iowa.

**December Notes from Eastern Iowa.**—We made some interesting observations while running trap lines on Plum Creek south of Earlville and at Rockville, on the North Fork of the Maquoketa River in extreme eastern Delaware County, between December 1 and 15, 1948. A male Hooded Merganser, a female Mallard, and a male Lesser Scaup were seen at Rockville nearly every day during this period. The Merganser dived under the ice on one occasion and later appeared at an open stretch of water 15 rods downstream; it apparently found air spaces for breathing under the ice during this interval of nearly 15 minutes.

A flock of 17 Mourning Doves was flushed daily up to December 15. They were in a wild hemp patch in a sandy bend along the North Fork; 9 doves were flushed from a weedy school yard on the banks of Plum Creek as

late as the 18th. We encountered Wilson's Snipes in both creeks until the sand bars were covered with ice December 8; a single snipe was flushed from a spring at Rockville on the 15th. Pileated Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches and Barred Owls were seen at Rockville on nearly every trip.

A single Green-winged Teal was seen on Plum Creek December 2. Mallards in very large flocks were seen alighting in cornfields as late as the 18th. These flocks gathered for feeding most often in the fields north and west of Dyersville and appeared from the northeast, probably coming from the Mississippi bottoms in the vicinity of Turkey River Junction. Quail were absent from cover where we usually found them in other years. Pheasants were very scarce in eastern Delaware County and western Dubuque County. Pheasant hunting was very poor near Dyersville, and the post-season population appeared to be about one-fifth that of the past two winters.—EDITH and EMMETT POLDER BOER, Dyersville, Iowa.

**Pacific Loon in Polk County, Iowa.**—On December 8, 1948, a Pacific Loon (*Gavia arctica pacifica*) in immature plumage was removed from the ice of Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines. Inasmuch as the bird was badly wounded, it was killed and made into a specimen for the State Historical Museum. To my knowledge, it is the first specimen of this species recorded in this state for a number of years. This specimen is black on the back with no spotting except on the wings and scapulars. The back of neck and top of head are dark gray with white throat and underparts, and a distinct brownish-gray band across the throat.—JACK W. MUSGROVE, Dept. of Hist. & Archives, Des Moines, Iowa.

**Pacific Loon and other Water Birds at Des Moines Impounding Reservoir.**—Des Moines and other Polk County birders have had many interesting experiences in the past few years at the new Des Moines Waterworks Impounding Reservoir, located in the southwest corner of Polk County. Among the many interesting species which it has been my pleasure to see, have been White Pelican, Horned Grebe, Hutchins's Goose, Oldsquaw and Buffle-head, as well as large flocks of all the common ducks and many of the less common species.

On one of my frequent visits to this interesting spot, on the afternoon of December 11, 1948, accompanied by Woodward H. Brown and two Boy Scouts, we saw a Pacific Loon (*Gavia arctica pacifica*), a most unusual sight. This loon was observed at close range, in good light, with a 20-power Argus scope. We immediately recognized the bird as a loon, and believed that it was of a species new to us. When first seen it was very near to some Mallards, and its size was similar to a Mallard drake. We were quickly attracted by the light ashy-gray color of the top of the head and back of the neck, which gradually shaded into black on the face and throat. Also, we noted that the back markings of black and white are quite different from those of our common Loon. On the Pacific Loon the white markings are larger and more prominent and are limited to patches on the wing and back rather than all over the back. All under parts showed pure white when the bird raised up and flapped its wings. It was a wonderful swimmer and diver, but we did not see it fly.

We returned the following day and saw the loon again in even better light and at closer range. At this nearer view we could distinguish the patches on the side of the neck showing vertical black and white stripes in a patch separating the gray area of the back of the neck, from the black of the front of the neck. Our observation was confirmed by Helen Peasley, Jack Musgrove and Bruce Stiles, who also visited the reservoir December 12. All of us noted something odd on the side of the bird's face. We did not know what this was, but it was thought it might be a leech.—ALBERT C. BERKOWITZ, Des Moines, Iowa.



**On the Decrease of Birds of Prey in Iowa.**—Though I have not had as many years in the field as Dr. Stewart, I too can see the decrease in our birds of prey as described in his article in the June issue of "Iowa Bird Life." In 1906 a paper on the bird life in Scott County, Iowa, was published in the "Wilson Bulletin." In my MS on the avifauna of the same area, completed in 1946, a direct comparison can be made showing the decline over a period of 40 years. For example, Wilson listed: Red-tailed Hawk—common resident; Broad-winged Hawk—tolerably common migrant; and American Rough-legged Hawk—tolerably common winter resident. I have recorded them in my list as: Red-tailed Hawk—tolerably common migrant and rare summer resident; Broad-wing—rare migrant; and the Rough-legged, rare and irregular in the winter. I suppose this is true over the entire state of Iowa. I think it is up to you and me, the true students of bird life, to spread the gospel of bird protection, emphasizing the economic importance of the more persecuted species. The majority of our newspapers have an Open Forum or People's Voice column which can very well serve as a medium to educate the public in this respect. In my local newspaper, two articles of some length have been published on the value of birds of prey, the most recent by Richard Schaefer. If every member of our organization would "break into print" just once before the year is over, commenting on the value of our birds or some other aspect of bird life, a great deal of good would be accomplished.—JAMES HODGES, Davenport, Iowa.

**Records of the American Egret in the Lake Region of Iowa.**—In various articles in newspapers and in other publications the statement has been made repeatedly that for 20 years the American Egret was not seen in Iowa. I have not seen any statement about when that 20-year period was supposed to have been. Here in the lake region at the northern edge of the state, as far as my observations go, the period would have to be previous to 1911. Although I and other members of my family were familiar with water fowl and waders as far back as the early 1890's, I saw my first egret in August of 1911, at High Lake in Emmet County. The appearance of this bird this far north in 1911 was reported in a short article in "Iowa Bird Life" for September, 1932, but this record has been ignored or overlooked by all who have written about the egret in Iowa since.

The summer of 1911 was extremely dry, and water in the lake was low with large areas of rushes in shallow parts. This egret was frequently observed in the shallow water outside the rushes for several weeks. I reported the presence of the bird here to the editor of "The Oologist" during the time it was seen. The editor responded with a personal letter stressing the extreme rareness of this bird and expressing the hope that it would not be killed. It was mentioned in a news note by the editor of the magazine, Vol. 28, 1911, p. 155.

There can be little doubt that a large white crane reported from the same lake in the late summer of 1926 by reliable persons was also an egret. The same conditions of a dry summer and rush-covered areas of the lake were prevalent also at that time. When I visited the lake early in September, I could not find the bird and consequently this was not a personal observation.

An egret was seen in August of 1932, in various places at different times by myself and others, in waters in Emmet and Palo Alto Counties. Possibly there was only one bird. In 1938 there were 10 birds at High Lake, and in more recent years 10 to 15 birds have been reported from this lake and other lakes in Emmet, Clay and Dickinson Counties.—B. O. WOLDEN, Estherville, Iowa.



**Carolina Wren in Burlington.**—While birding in the south section of the city of Burlington, Des Moines County, on January 2, 1949, we carefully observed a Carolina Wren which was actively searching for food in characteristic wren fashion. This was near Crapo Park in the same location where a family of six or seven Carolina Wrens were seen during the previous summer. A Flicker, Song Sparrow, Bald Eagles and a flock of Purple Finches were seen in the same locality that day.—FRIEDA and GEORGE CROSSLEY, Farley, Iowa.

**Mockingbird in Jasper County.**—On April 18, 1948, my family and I were hiking across pasture land near the edge of oak timber about a mile south of Newton, when we saw an unfamiliar bird busily working on the ground for its supper. Having our binoculars with us, we immediately recognized it as a Mockingbird, with which I was familiar in other areas. An hour was spent observing it at ranges as near as 20 feet. After returning home, I called others of our bird club and we went back to the same spot to find it still there. On checking I found there was no record of the Mockingbird in Jasper County except in Anderson's "Birds of Iowa" (1907), and in this publication the place and year is indefinite.—JOHN PAUL MOORE, President of Newton Bird and Nature Club, Newton, Iowa.

**Use of Deserted Nests by Other Birds.**—In the course of field work we often come upon a deserted bird's nest that is being used by another species as a nesting site. During the last few years I have found a number of such nests which I shall describe here. All observations were made in Scott County, Iowa. On May 16, 1948, I found a Mourning Dove incubating two eggs in a Bronzed Grackle's nest in a pine tree at Mast Nursery. This nest was constructed and used in 1947. I found one other grackle's nest that was occupied by a dove; the only difference was that the grackles raised their young and as soon as the nestlings were fledged the doves took over the nest. This particular nest had been partly upset the night before by a storm. The dove then added a few sticks to the overturned nest, molded a cup with its breast, and laid its eggs. I found one other case when a Bronzed Grackle's nest was involved. On June 20, 1948, in Pine Hill Cemetery, I found a Robin incubating two eggs in the nest of a grackle. The grackles had just raised one brood in the nest.

On May 18, 1948, along Duck Creek, I found a nest of the Black-capped Chickadee containing five birds which I banded. The nesting site was a deserted cavity of the Downy Woodpecker. On May 27 I again revisited the nesting site to find that the nestling Chickadees had left and a House Wren had taken the nest over and had deposited one egg. It is common for the Chickadee to occupy deserted nesting cavities of the smaller woodpeckers. The same is true of the House Wrens. They have increased in such numbers in Iowa that no longer are there enough bird houses for them. They use many tree cavities for nesting sites. It is rather unusual to find one species using the same hole immediately after the first owner has completed its nesting.

Another case involving a hole-nesting species was at Credit Island during the 1946 nesting season. In a limb of a dead tree the season before a woodpecker of an unrecorded kind evacuated a hole where it raised its young. During the first part of the 1946 nesting season, a pair of English Sparrows raised a brood and were preparing to start another when they were driven out by a European Starling, which in turn raised one brood. As soon as the nest was deserted by the Starlings, a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers took the nest and raised one brood. When the Red-headed Woodpeckers finished using the cavity it was in the first part of September. It should be noted, however, that on Credit Island during that year there was a scarcity of nesting holes because a number of dead trees or their limbs had been removed by

the park board. This made competition keen among the some ten or more cavity-nesting birds on the island. It would be interesting to know what prompts a non-hole-nesting species to take over a deserted cavity and use it for its own.—JAMES HODGES, Davenport, Iowa.

**Rock Doves and Cliff Swallows at Iowa Falls.**—On July 4, 1948, the writer and his family were returning from northern Iowa. The route passed through Iowa Falls, Iowa, where we paused to make a few observations along the limestone cliffs that border that portion of the Iowa River.

Through the city these cliffs rise to a height of 30 and 40 feet directly above the water. The cliffs themselves appear badly worn by the action of the weather. In places the narrow strata had crumpled, thus leaving frequent crevices and narrow ledges. This apparently formed ideal nesting and resting places for Rock Doves. By walking out on the "swinging bridge" (for pedestrians only) that connects Iowa Falls and the Baptist Camp, Rock Doves were seen in abundance flying along the cliffs both above and below the bridge, and on both sides of the river. Local townspeople refer to the Rock Doves as "Cliff Pigeons," and road signs at the edge of the town call attention of tourists to this unique sight. English sparrows too were frequently heard and appeared to be using the eroded cliffs for nesting. At one point a female sparrow was carrying nesting material to a rock crevice. One Barn Swallow and two Rough-winged Swallows were also seen from the foot-bridge.

About a half-mile down stream a sizeable colony of Cliff Swallows was found. The writer and his son, David, prevailed upon a riverman to take them over to the colony in his boat. To the consternation of all, the outboard motor ran out of gas in midstream. The situation was of some concern because the boat contained no oars and a large dam could easily be seen a short distance down stream. By vigorous "hand paddling" the opposite cliff—and the swallow colony—were reached. A second boatman graciously ferried over a supply of gasoline.

The main colony of Cliff Swallows is located on the south side of the river between the Oak Street Bridge and the River Street Bridge. The cliffs at this point are about 40 feet above the river and appear relatively smooth. No Rock Doves were nesting here. Two large clusters of the retort-shaped nests were noted, each located in a well-protected spot under a cliff over-hang and about 30 feet apart. One cluster contained 55 complete nests and four incomplete ones. The other group included 126 complete nests and 14 incomplete ones. This made a total of 181 complete nests. All of the young birds observed were able to fly.

Up stream from this point, and between the River Street Bridge and the Washington Avenue Bridge, was a small abandoned nesting of the Cliff Swallows. Here one complete nest and five incomplete nests were seen. Dried grass stems protruded from the opening of the completed nest, and it presumably had been taken over by a pair of the many English Sparrows found in that immediate vicinity. The cliffs at this point were only about 25 or 30 feet high, and numerous crevices here provided competitive advantage to both Rock Doves and English Sparrows.

It might be added that the writer has seen only two other cliff nestings of the Rock Doves in Iowa. They are found in the quarry at Stone City, west of Anamosa (erroneously referred to as north of Anamosa in "Iowa Bird Life," Vol. III, p. 10), and occasionally in the small stone quarry southeast of Mount Vernon, Iowa. Outside of the State, he has also noted them in the rock gorge below Niagara Falls, New York.—J. HAROLD ENNIS, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

**A 1946 Record of the Gyrfalcon in Emmet County.**—On October 27, 1946, while hunting ducks on Cheever Lake three miles south of Estherville, Emmet



County, Iowa, we observed a gray Gyrfalcon at rather close range. The bird approached from the south and flew directly overhead. It just cleared the tree tops and gave our party an excellent view. Its large size, typical falcon build with sharply pointed wings and rather robust body were very evident. Its under parts were light in color and showed some dark streaking. We were also able to get a good view of the bird's back as it banked after passing overhead. The back showed even dusty gray coloration. I am positive of the identification of this bird, as it was identified at once by three of the members of our party—myself, Maynard Reece, and Mrs. Musgrove, all of whom are acquainted with other birds of similar appearance and have had previous experience with the Duck Hawk and Prairie Falcon, which might be confused with this species. The autumn of 1946 showed Gyrfalcons in other states not far away from Iowa; others were reported in Dakota about the same time of year.—JACK W. MUSGROVE, Museum Director, Dept. of History & Archives, Des Moines, Iowa.

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#### MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We received the program of an organ recital by Wier R. Mills too late for mention in our last issue. Mr. Mills, who lives at Pierson, is an organist of note; the recital consisted of 16 numbers and was held in the Pierson Methodist Church, Sunday evening, November 14. A Charter Member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, Mr. Mills is a well-known local authority on bird life as well as an expert on wild flowers and certain domesticated varieties.

Miss Zell Lee, of the Sioux City Bird Club, underwent major surgery in early January, and spent a three-weeks "vacation" in a hospital. We are glad to learn that she has recovered her health and is ready for the spring bird migration.

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, with whom we held a joint convention last spring, will celebrate their golden anniversary in 1949 and will hold their annual meeting at Lincoln on May 7 and 8. On the morning of the first day there will be a paper-reading session and in the afternoon they will hold a symposium on bird population studies, with the annual banquet occupying that evening. On Sunday, May 8, the annual field trip will take place, with plans to cover northeastern Saline County in Nebraska.

Myra and Lucile Loban of Waterloo spent the greater part of the winter in Florida. They left Waterloo shortly after the Christmas holidays. A December issue of the Waterloo "Courier" carried a lengthy story about the twin sisters and printed a photo of them. The sisters were born in Kansas and moved to Waterloo in 1907. They began teaching careers in the rural schools of Floyd County and later taught for two years in South Dakota, after which they began teaching in the Waterloo schools. Both became principals in the city grade schools and these positions they held for many years. Miss Myra retired last spring, and Miss Lucile retired during the Christmas holidays. They have been members of our organization for ten years and are well known as Waterloo bird students. They planned to visit "Bird City," Mr. McIlhenny's bird sanctuary on Avery Island, Louisiana, on their way to Florida, and thus have a fine section of Louisiana bird life to supplement their observations of Florida birds.

John D. Goodman, formerly of Fairfield, Iowa, is now a teacher in the biology department of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. His wife, who worked on the life history of the Caspian Tern for two summers under Dr. Olin S. Pettingill at the University of Michigan Biological Station, at Douglas Lake, is engaged in writing up a portion of her research, in addition to other duties. In a January letter Mr. Goodman said, in part:

"We are enjoying the birds down here a lot. You may remember I was stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., from 1942 to August, 1943, and I saw a lot of



the southern birds then. So it has been fun renewing old acquaintances. We both enjoy the Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warblers and Black and White Warblers that are wintering in south Georgia. And the Robins! A trip into Okefinokee Swamp over the Thanksgiving holidays showed it to be literally alive with them. On this trip we saw many Water Turkeys or Anhingas, which are common in the southern swamps, and Pileated Woodpeckers. On the open savannah in the middle of the swamp, known as Floyd's Prairie, we saw dozens of alligators sunning themselves, with the big Wood Ibises and American Egrets wheeling overhead. The trip was made by boat with a guide, the only way one can go very far into the swamp.

"Shortly after Christmas we took a trip to see some Florida bird life. We drove down to Silver Springs the first day and then over to Tampa, St. Pete, and Pass-a-grille. The following morning we went on a bird hike with friends. They had just finished the Christmas bird count but were ready to go again. We visited a Ward's Heron rookery, saw many Bald Eagles there and elsewhere. In the mangrove swamps were many American and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue, Louisiana and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, and shore birds. We saw two nice flocks of White Ibis, as well as the Wood Ibis. The bay was full of ducks, predominately Scaup, some Blacks and many Pintails. Over the bay were the gulls and terns. We picked out the Laughing, Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, Royal and Forster's Terns, and probably missed several—among them Cabot's Tern which is fairly common here. On our return north we stopped at Wakulla Springs, south of Tallahassee. It is a bird paradise and I've seen no greater concentrations anywhere down here. On a short trip we saw innumerable ducks of many kinds including lovely Wood Ducks, hundreds of Coots, Gallinules, Baldpates, Mallards and Black Ducks. Our biggest thrill was seeing two Limpkins at very close range as they waded among the pond lilies. On New Year's Day we watched White-throated Sparrows playing in the sunshine on the lawn outside the Wakulla Springs Hotel. We drove to the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf, where are seen wintering ducks and geese by the thousands in the brackish pools on the flats. We passed hundreds of ducks on the marsh or in the air and drove out to the lighthouse on the point. It was getting late now, and the sun was setting in a red glow over the Gulf. There were still a few strings of geese and ducks in the sky—certainly a picture never to be forgotten. After a while we hiked back to the lighthouse where we had left the jeep and started for home. We both had the elated feeling that we had seen all we had expected on this trip, and much more."

A bird club was organized at Grinnell on December 15, 1948. E. A. Kurth writing on January 12, said: "We are now in the process of organizing and planning for the future. We have about 25 members so far and probably shall have about 10 or 15 more. The officers for the year 1949 are E. A. Kurth, president; Robert Breiting, vice-president; and Miss Irene Cook, secretary-treasurer. I am urging all our club members to join the Iowa Ornithologists' Union." There is also a new bird club at Newton. Sometime this year we hope to get all the local Iowa bird clubs to send in reports on their activities—a phase of reporting for "Iowa Bird Life" that has been neglected during the past year.

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Our neighbor, South Dakota, now has a state bird organization. The South Dakota Ornithologists' Union was organized at Sioux Falls, on Jan. 15, 1949, by an active and enthusiastic group to whom we extend congratulations. We wish for the new society a long life and a healthy growth. Iowa bird students interested in becoming members should write to J. S. Findley, chairman of the membership committee, 1201 S. Center Ave., Sioux Falls, S. Dak.